

# DPH Launches Lyme Disease Awareness Campaign

**DOVER** – While many Delawareans couldn't be happier to see spring's arrival and winter's departure, the Division of Public Health (DPH) is warning residents that with warm weather comes ticks, fleas, mosquitoes and increased chances of vector-borne diseases. Whether staying home or traveling in the coming months, DPH wants to remind Delawareans of the risk of these diseases, which include Lyme disease, Zika, and West Nile Virus, and to share prevention tips.



"While we want everyone to get outside and enjoy the weather, taking advantage of additional opportunities for family time and exercise, we also hope each person takes the proper precautions to protect themselves and others, especially children, as well as pets from the diseases that can potentially come with insect bites," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay.

According to data just released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2016, Delaware reported 545 cases of tick borne diseases and 35 cases of mosquito borne diseases. The CDC listed Lyme disease as the state's top tick

borne disease, accounting for 93 percent (506) of the cases. DPH recently finalized its 2017 data and is reporting 608 cases of Lyme disease last year, an increase of more than 100 cases since 2016. The CDC believes that the actual number of Lyme disease cases nationwide is 10 times higher than what is reported to doctors or state and county health departments.

Since May is also Lyme Disease Awareness Month, DPH has launched a campaign titled, "BLAST Lyme disease," which was adapted with permission from the Ridgefield, Connecticut, BLAST Program. The "BLAST" acronym is a simple way to remember five simple steps you can take to protect yourself, family, and pets from Lyme disease:

- Bathe or shower within two hours of coming indoors.
- Look for ticks on your body and remove them.
- Apply repellent to your body and clothes.
- Spray your yard.
- Treat your pet.

Lyme disease is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States with approximately 20,000 new cases reported each year. It is frequently characterized by an expanding red rash, commonly referred to as a "bull's eye rash." Rashes can occur anywhere on the body and vary in size and shape. The rash can be warm to the touch, but usually not painful or itchy. Not all patients will develop the characteristic rash. Other symptoms include fever and or chills, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, and headaches. Untreated infections can lead to symptoms including severe joint pain and swelling (usually large joints, particularly the knees), loss of muscle tone on one or both sides of the face (called "Bell's palsy"), heart palpitations and dizziness, severe headaches and neck stiffness due to meningitis, and neurological problems (i.e., numbness or tingling in the hands or feet, problems with concentration and short-term memory).

The BLAST campaign will run through the summer and early fall months and includes advertisements on Facebook, several local

websites, and Spanish-language publications. DPH has also updated its website to include fun activities for children to learn about Lyme disease called “Kids Korner,” and has detailed instructions for tick removal. To see these features and learn more about Lyme disease, visit [de.gov/lyme](http://de.gov/lyme).

Additionally, education packets have been sent to all public, private and charter schools, public libraries, and licensed summer camps. DPH is also mailing materials to pediatricians and family practice providers, coordinating with DNREC on outreach to state parks and providing email communications to community partners.

All of Delaware’s reported mosquito-borne diseases last year were travel-related and not spread through the bite of a mosquito locally. The CDC reported Delaware’s top mosquito-borne disease in 2016 as Zika (17 cases). Malaria accounted for another 16 cases, and Dengue for the last two.

Although Delaware has not had a reported Zika case since 2016, the disease still poses a threat, particularly to those traveling abroad and those who are, or may become, pregnant. Zika is a disease caused by a virus primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. Most people who are infected with Zika do not develop symptoms. About one in five people infected with the virus develop the disease and symptoms are generally mild. Anyone who lives or travels in the impacted areas can be infected.

Zika symptoms, typically include rash, fever, joint pain and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The largest health impact of the Zika virus appears to be on infants whose mother was infected during pregnancy. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly, a condition in which a baby’s head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age, as well as other poor pregnancy outcomes. To learn about Zika risks and how to protect yourself from Zika, visit [de.gov/zika](http://de.gov/zika).

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.